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Three journalists report on political leaders and issues in the Philippines

By Peter I. Rose

Waltzing with a Dictator, by Raymond Bonner. New York: Time Books. 512 pp. \$19.95.

The Four Days of Courage, by Bryan Johnson. New York: The Free Press. 284 pp. \$19.95.

Corazon Aquino, by Lucy Komisar. New York: George Braziller, Inc. 290 pp. \$16.95.

Books by political journalists are a special genre. Sometimes full of sound and fury, sometimes cool and analytical, they are often polemical. Their writers take sides. Not surprisingly, the most convincing cases are made by those who combine homework and fieldwork, the careful marshaling of information about the subject, complemented and embellished by eyewitness reportage.

These three new volumes on the Philippines, while different in scope and style, are all representative of the form. The first — and best — is an assessment of the United States' longtime support of Ferdinand Marcos; the second is an account of the mutiny of reformists in the military, which assured the succession of Corazon Aquino; the third is a portrait of the widow who would be president.

Raymond Bonner's book is a superb piece of foreign policy analysis based on investigative reporting and the examination of thousands of documents. The former New York Times correspondent offers a detailed exposé of America's protracted "waltz" with Ferdinand Marcos, a *danse politique* in which he (or his "first lady," Imelda) did most of the leading. Far more comprehensive than the other books, Bonner's examines the totality of the Janus-faced United States policy toward the Philippines (one side touting the country as a showcase of Western-style democracy in East Asia, the other worrying about the

vulnerability of that front-line state in the crusade against communism). Again and again, Bonner shows how, to gain Washington's backing, all the Marcoses had to do was raise the specter of the red menace and the most powerful movers and shakers in every administration from Lyndon Johnson's to Ronald Reagan's would fall in line.

In addition to consideration of the behavior of the main American players and of the Marcoses themselves, Bonner discusses the roles of such critical figures as George Kennan, the shaper of American policy toward the post-independent Philippines; Edward Lansdale, the legendary Ugly American; Henry Alfred Byroade, the tough ambassador;

BOOKS

✓ CIA agent David Sternberg, who posed as a journalist and was a free-lance contributor to this newspaper for many years; Juan Ponce Enrile, the once-and-future defense minister; Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino, the principal catalyst for the changes that were finally to come; "suspect Carterites" such as Morton Abramowitz, Leslie Gelb, and Richard Holbrooke; and a number of American congressmen, including Rep. Stephen Solarz and Sen. Paul Laxalt, who, each in his own way played a crucial part in bringing down the final curtain on the Marcos era.

Bryan Johnson's purview is far more limited: His principal time frame is not measured in decades but in days, four crucial days. His objective is to tell the story of the revolt against the Marcoses' "kleptocracy" that led to the Filipinos' own disengagement from the embrace of the dictator, a move made possible, he argues, because of the mass defection of the military.

Johnson, a correspondent for the Toronto Globe and Mail, has

a special fascination for his wife's homeland, its spirit and its spirituality, its politics and its people. His book, an almost play-by-play account of the final showdown, does not focus on the principal protagonists in the disputed presidential election of 1986 but on their generals, the "honorable" Fidel Ramos (a defector who was to lead the Reform the Armed Forces Now Movement) and the "sinister" Fabian Ver, their side-switching minions, and Jaime Cardinal Sin, the prelate who gave the revolution his blessing and encouraged the campaign of believers in what, Johnson suggests, he came to see as inspired insurrection against the forces of evil.

Vivid characterizations persist throughout this, the most unabashedly partisan of the three volumes. It is full of breathless, hyperbolic prose, and colorful word portraits of good guys and bad guys, often using biblical imagery. Whether describing the revolt; the imminent onslaught of the Loyalists with their formidable armor and bristling artillery; the one woman, June Keithley, controlling the airwaves on Radio Bandido; or the capitulation itself, there is a constant evocation of Old Testament struggles being waged with 20th-century devices. Reading "The Four Days of Courage" is like watching a Hollywood film — which, I suspect, it will soon become.

Lucy Komisar, a free-lance journalist and sensitive writer whose articles have appeared in many newspapers, including the Monitor, covered the 1986 elections in the Philippines and the peaceful revolution that followed. She returned to write her "unauthorized biography" of Corazon Aquino.

Despite her obvious affection for the new president, Komisar does not refrain from pointing out her foibles and those of her family and others in her entourage. Writing about the life and times of Mrs. Aquino, her background, her years in the US, her subordinate role as the self-effacing wife of a prominent and flamboyant political figure, her reluctant involvement to become a stand-in candidate for her assassinated husband, and her manner of rising to meet the challenge and to mobilize a nation against the entrenched oligarchy, Komisar conveys a clear sense of both the inner strength and political metamorphosis of a remarkable woman. "Cory was a phenomenon. A charismatic leader who spoke in a monotone, she aroused trust, love, even adulation among the masses. She was not simply [Roman] Catholic, but spiritual to the core. . . . She was also a fatalist. Death would come at the appointed time. Those who tried to scare her have realized that her faith and fatalism would make her a willing martyr."

As Komisar shows in her review of the trials and tribulations of President Aquino's first year in office, despite attempted coups and challenges to force her out — including one led by the enigmatic Enrile — none succeeded. She remained in control, trying to set a new course through a quagmire created, in large part, by her predecessor and his American supporters.